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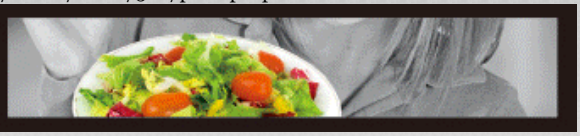

Peak People

by nickland @ Friday, 20 May 2011 17:25

Could we be facing the ultimate resource crunch?

Over at Zero Hedge, Sean Corrigan unleashes a fizzing polemic against the (M. King Hubbert) 'Peak Oil' school of resource doomsters (enjoy the article if you're *laissez-faire* inclined, or the comments if you're not).

Of particular relevance to density advocates is Corrigan's "exercise in contextualization" (a kind of de-stressed *Stand on Zanzibar*) designed to provide an image of the planet's 'demographic burden':

For example, just as an exercise in contextualisation, consider the following:-

The population of Hong Kong: 7 million. Its surface area: 1,100 km2

The population of the World: nigh on 7 billion, i.e., HK x 1000

1000 x area of HK = 110,000 km2 = the area of Cuba or Iceland

Approximate area of the Earth's landmass = 150 million km2

Approximate total surface area = 520 million km2

So, were we to build one, vast city of the same population density as Hong Kong to cover the entirety of [Cuba], this would accommodate all of humanity, and take up just 0.07% of the planet's land area and 0.02% of the Earth's surface.

Anybody eagerly anticipating hypercities, arcologies, and other prospective experiments in large-scale social packing is likely to find this calculation rather disconcerting, if only because – taken as a whole -- Hong Kong actually isn't that dense. For sure, the downtown 'synapse' connecting the HK Island with Kowloon is impressively intense, but most of the Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region) is green, rugged, and basically deserted. It's (mean) average density of 6,364 / km2 doesn't get anywhere close to that of the top 100 cities (Manila's 43,000 / km2 is almost seven times greater). Corrigan isn't envisaging a megalopolis, but a Cuba-scale suburb.

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Whether densitarians are more or less likely than average to worry about Peak Oil or related issue
question (the New Urbanists tend to be quite greenish). If they really want to see cities scale the h
however, they need to start worrying about population shortage. With the human population proj
billion, there might never be enough people to make cities into the ultra-dense monsters that futı
hungered for.

Bryan Caplan is sounding the alarm. At least we have teeming Malthusian robot hordes to look forwar

Comments

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